

REPORT OF THE: COUNCILLOR WASEEM ZAFFAR AND PETER HAY
BIRMINGHAM CHILD POVERTY COMMISSION REPORT

The motion: The Council welcomes and notes the independent Child Poverty Commission report and its recommendations.

1. Introduction

1.1 The attached independent report of the Birmingham Child Poverty Commission launched on 30th June 2016 makes 24 recommendations (see appendix 1) aimed at reducing child poverty in Birmingham. The report has been developed by an independent non-partisan Commission chaired by Matthew Reed, CEO, The Children's Society. The Commission includes experts from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

2. Background

2.1 Reducing child poverty is a key priority for the City Council. Estimates of child poverty for Birmingham show that 37% of children in Birmingham were living below the poverty line in 2013 after housing costs (AHC).¹

2.2 The City Council made a commitment to establish a Commission to: examine the extent and impact of child poverty and inequality across Birmingham; identify the key challenges and issues; and report on causes and solutions. The Birmingham Child Poverty Commission was set up by Birmingham City Council in May 2015 to explore the circumstances that create child poverty; the impact it has on children and families and crucially, to identify solutions that mitigate against the effects of child poverty in Birmingham.

2.3 The role of the Commission was to:

- Establish clear future targets for child poverty
- Set out the child poverty challenge for Birmingham: update the needs assessment to understand the scale of the challenge
- Produce a Birmingham child poverty strategy/framework for action, building on local and national practice and exploring new approaches.
- Establish a coordinated approach to reducing child poverty by bringing together fora that address child poverty
- Identify and determine the impact of poverty on different groups, communities and geographical areas most at risk
- Make policy recommendations on integrated approaches that mitigate the effects of child poverty

¹ <https://brumchildpoverty.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/child-poverty-needs-assessment-for-birmingham-summer-20155.pdf>

2.4 The composition of the commission includes the following organisations and experts:

- Chair: Matthew Reed, CEO, The Children's Society
- Vice Chair : Sam Monaghan, Executive Director of Children's Services, Barnardo's
- Expert Commissioner: Prof Peter Alcock, University of Birmingham
- Private Sector: Dr Jason Wouhra, Regional Chair of Institute of Directors
- Voluntary and Community Sector: Alison Moore, Third Sector Assembly
- Birmingham City Council: Cllr Waseem Zaffar (Labour), Cabinet Member for Openness, Transparency and Equality
- Birmingham City Council: Councillor Robert Alden (Conservative)
- Birmingham City Council: Councillor Roger Harmer (Liberal Democrat)
- Public Health: Dr Dennis Wilkes Specialist Public Health lead for Children's Health & Wellbeing
- Birmingham City Council: Children and young People: Peter Hay, Strategic Director of People

3. Targeted themes

3.1 Given the diversity and complexity of child poverty the Commission published a Child Poverty Needs Assessment in 2015 setting out the child poverty landscape in Birmingham. This assessment of need helped the Commission to focus their research on five broad themes against which they developed an understanding of the cause and effect of poverty and what needs to happen to alleviate child poverty, these include:

- Health
- Housing
- In work poverty
- Economy and worklessness
- Education and lifelong learning

4. Citywide insights and experiences that helped shape the recommendations

4.1 To help formulate and design proposals to reduce child poverty, the Commission took evidence from children, young people and parents to get a better understanding of the lived experience of poverty; as well as expert opinion from community and voluntary organisations, statutory service providers and private sector. Listening to those who experience or have experienced hardships gave

invaluable insights into the narratives that play out across the city, while at the same time, allowing participants to suggest solutions.

4.2 The report is based on a series of focus group sessions, surveys and workshops. Including:

Over 200 participants shared their experiences, views and ideas in the following sessions:

- Focus groups with young people from Aspire and Succeed, Lozells, The Light House Young People Centre, Aston and The Factory Young People's Centre, Longbridge .
- Big conversations with parents from Balsall Heath Children's centre and Summerfield Children's Centre, Ladywood.
- Interactive discussions with pupils from Future First Independent School (alternative education provider) based in Hockley.
- Meetings with voluntary and community organisations and forums working with children and families including: Supporting People Domestic Violence Forum, KIKIT CIC, Aspire and Succeed, Gateway Family Services.
- Neighbourhood visits to meet with voluntary and faith based organisations supporting vulnerable children and families including Oasis Academy based in the Winson Green.
- A funding event with voluntary and community organisations working with children and families from Ladywood hosted by Big Lottery and Equalities, Community Safety and Cohesion Service.
- A Business leaders meeting hosted by Aston University.
- Meeting with Birmingham Faith Network

Further research was commissioned with The Children's Society to build on the qualitative research already undertaken. This included:

- A survey of 200 parents of children aged under 18 living in Birmingham
- Focus group session with Primary schools: Somerville Primary, Benson Community Primary, Kings Heath Primary and Secondary Schools: Holte Academy ,City of Birmingham school, Millpool Centre PRU,Perry Beeches Secondary, Queensbridge school and Washwood Heath Academy
- In depth interview with families

4.3 The qualitative and quantitative research outlined above provided strong evidence that shaped the recommendations included in the report.

Appendix 1

Birmingham Child Poverty Commission Recommendations

The Commission makes the following 24 recommendations:

1. By September 2017, the Birmingham Secondary Schools Forum working with Birmingham City Council, Birmingham Education Partnership and Business leaders should develop a specific offer for disadvantaged pupils at KS4 to provide intensive support to narrow the attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children at this level.

There is the potential that this could be funded through the pupil premium. It is proposed that a mentoring scheme with local businesses could be run alongside or be part of this specific offer for KS4 pupils.

The roll out of this scheme should focus initially on the lowest performing groups at KS4.

2. An annual or biennial 'Best of Birmingham' event should be introduced by July 2017 to showcase and celebrate outstanding children, young people and the adults that support them.
3. Birmingham City Council and Birmingham Education Partnership should assist schools to establish formal partnerships with universities, both in the UK and abroad. The purposes of so doing include: raising students' awareness and aspirations of the opportunities for higher education; enhancing partnerships between schools and universities for professional development; and influencing standards of teaching and learning.

This recommendation should be carried out by June 2017.

4. By September 2016, there should be a named Cabinet Member with responsibility for poverty.
5. By January 2017, adult education providers to provide data for all Birmingham City Council courses so that the reach and impact of adult education in the city can be appropriately analysed.
6. Through existing resources and by January 2017, the DWP, working closely with schools, Birmingham City Council and voluntary sector, should rotate benefits and other financial advisers around those schools/children's centres with high levels of need offering an outreach financial inclusion service.
7. Where required, parents should be encouraged to take up ESOL classes, particularly for groups whose language is a barrier to the labour market. These should be scheduled in schools around pick up/drop off times for children. This system should be in place by Spring Term 2017 and led by the ESOL providers in the city.

8. By January 2018, Birmingham City Council should adopt a undertake a formal review of their housing standards enforcement, with a view to introducing a landlord accreditation scheme such as that in operation in Newham.
9. By January 2018, there should be a planning restriction in place preventing new fast food outlets within 250 metres of schools.
10. By April 2017, Birmingham City Council should adopt a local 'breathing space' placing council tax accounts on hold for 21 days when a family gets in touch with them so as to enable the family time to seek independent debt advice. The Council should also adopt an explicit policy of not engaging bailiffs for families in receipt of Council Tax Support.
11. By July 2017, all schools should adapt their school uniform policy to ensure affordability is a primary consideration.
12. By December 2016 Birmingham City Council should establish the School Food Trust to provide free school meals for all school pupils whose families are in receipt of working tax credits, child tax credits and universal credit (when rolled out), with the ultimate aim of providing universal free school meals.
13. By December 2016, Birmingham City Council should work with JobCentrePlus and employment support providers to ensure that parents of two year olds taking up funded early education are specifically targeted with employment and skills support that encourages starting work or training, and that wrap-around childcare is sufficiently affordable and flexible to enable those parents to sustain and increase their employment opportunities.
14. Birmingham City Council should use its powers as a commissioner and champion of Birmingham to work with local businesses and the Living Wage Foundation to make Birmingham the first Living Wage City where all employers pay this minimum amount, by January 2019.
15. By June 2017, Registered Social Landlords should commit to introducing a minimum of 3-year tenancies, allowing for greater stability for tenants and landlords. By September 2017 this information should be made available for families on Birmingham City Council's website.
16. By March 2017, an audit should be completed on the number of schools that have access to counselling support and do a cost analysis of providing outreach counselling service to schools with the highest proportion of pupils in receipt of pupil premium.
17. The new city centre hub Pause should be advertised in services accessed by children and families, including the School Health Advisory Services and Children's Centres.

18. A targeted obesity programme in primary school to reduce the rise in childhood obesity should be in place by September 2017.
19. By June 2017, the tendering process should be used to ensure that new projects over £500,000 encourage greater numbers of quality apprenticeships offered to young people from low-income families in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands.
20. By January 2017, all Birmingham City Council-approved strategies should include a mandatory section on the public health and health inequality implications of the issue under consideration.
21. By April 2017, Birmingham City Council should exempt care leavers from Council Tax up to, and including, the age of 25.
22. By April 2019, Birmingham City Council should adopt a policy that no low-income family with children can be declared intentionally homeless.
23. By April 2017, Birmingham City Council should explore potential for subsidised transport for young people within city localities, using Merseytravel's 'My ticket' scheme as a model.
24. By June 2017, Birmingham City Council should have reviewed how improved data sharing processes could be used to automatically enrol children for free school meals in order to increase take up.